

Talking turkey over Xmas

Where you live could determine what's on the menu this Christmas, writes Brittany Baker.

Christmas dinner varies considerably depending on where in the country you eat it, according to figures from one of New Zealand's big supermarket chains.

When it came to the main meal, the regions showed drastically diverse tastes.

In Canterbury, a traditional festive ham and turkey with roast vegetables will be pick of the Christmas meals.

The Far North and Manawatu-Wanganui were preparing sausages and lamb while Auckland, Nelson and Marlborough were serving up salmon.

TV chef Mike Van de Elzen said proximity to food sources could be a factor influencing Christmas palates.

He wasn't surprised to hear the South Island having lamb for Christmas dinner.

"I'm on the West Coast and I know we're having lamb."

Although Wellington will mostly munch on beef fillet and salmon on the barbecue, Masterton was noted as the only spot in the North Island to prefer turkey for the holiday season.

This could be attributed to a turkey farm in the area, senior lecturer Janet Webber of Massey University's school of food and nutrition said.

"It depends on what's accessible with a mix of traditions. If something local pops up and the price is right, it might influence someone."

Webber said the evolution of food culture may have resulted in regional differences in Christmas cuisine.

"Further south is more traditional. Canterbury has its English roots.

"And further north, like Marlborough, is a bit more alternative," she said.

This was evident with Southland and Otago dishing out glazed ham while Nelson and Marlborough served sausage and salads.

In the end, Van de Elzen shrugged it off to family tradition.

"It depends on what families usually have for Christmas dinner," he said.

"I come from a Dutch background and while we've lost some of our Christmas traditions, my wife is whipping up a plum pudding this year."

Countdown general manager of merchandise Chris Fisher collected data from around the country that found the country's regions had varying tastes when it came to the Christmas feast.

Though a majority of Kiwis craved pavlova and strawberries for dessert, Fisher's data found some regions outranked others when it came to who had what type of sweet tooth.

The traditional meringue-based treat was most popular among Cantabrians, whom Fisher found to be the largest consumers of pavlova than any other region.

Those to break away from the iconic Kiwi dessert included South Canterbury, Manawatu and the North Shore of Auckland, where families gorged on Christmas pudding.

And although Marlborough, Nelson and Aucklanders picked strawberries and cherries with fresh cream as their dessert of choice, it was no match for the Far North,

which topped the charts in fruit consumption. Canterbury was a close second.

Fisher said the last week before Christmas was a time Kiwis flooded food stores to tick off the rest of their Christmas grocery lists.

But supermarkets were not the only outlets to see last-minute shoppers rushing in for fresh produce.

Though his strawberries were ripe for picking by Labour Weekend, the owner of Paradise Valley Berry Farm, Steve Smith, found berry lovers scrambling to his Taranaki business just days before the family feast, supplies often running out by day's end.

"You can never grow enough strawberries for Christmas," he said. "Maybe it's a New Zealand thing. People just go crazy for them."

However, research released by Kiwi Property, which owns several of New Zealand's largest shopping malls, found food to be the second most popular Christmas tradition.

Decorating the tree ranked first and present shopping came in third.

The shopping spree data exposed

more variations between regions when it came to the holiday season.

Customers at Porirua's North City Shopping Centre ranked the least organised in the country with many hunting for presents just days before Christmas.

Meanwhile, Christchurch was ranked as the most prepared with 40 per cent of the city picking up gifts throughout the year.

Auckland male shoppers came in a close second, with 10 per cent purchasing Boxing Day bargains for next year's holiday season.

Kiwi Property general manager Karl Retief said no matter the variations, there would be one shared consequence: "We are all as likely to need a nap on Christmas Day".



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Mike Van de Elzen



Christmas favourites

